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Contra bid must succeed, Sanchez warns

By Roger Fontaine
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Any insurrection in Nicaragua against Sandinista rule must not be allowed to fail as was the case in Hungary and East Germany a generation ago, according to the retiring senior Latin American specialist in the Pentagon.

"We must make sure that it succeeds," Nestor D. Sanchez, outgoing deputy assistant secretary of defense for inter-American affairs, told The Washington Times in an interview Friday.

He envisioned a scenario in which the Nicaraguan resistance, known as Contras, gains increasing acceptance as a "viable alternative" to the Sandinistas. This in turn will produce military defections, followed by a popular insurrection.

Mr. Sanchez retired last week after 30 years of government service in both the CIA and the Department of Defense. Much of that time was spent on Latin American assignments.

In a ceremony Thursday, he was congratulated personally by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and in a let-

ter from President Reagan.

In the letter, Mr. Reagan thanked Mr. Sanchez for his five and half years in the Pentagon assignment and gave him major credit "in formulating policy for the region."

Mr. Sanchez, known for his hard-line views, has served longer in his role than any of his counterparts at State, the CIA,

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and the National Security Council, where changeovers have occurred two or three times since 1981.

Despite the continuing controversy over the Reagan administration's arms shipments to Iran and alleged diversion of funds from those sales to support anti-Sandinista rebels, Mr. Sanchez remains confident the Nicaraguan resistance can grow in strength provided U.S. support continues.

"The alternative is just totally unac-

ceptable," he said, defining the alternative as the consolidation of a second Cuba in the Western Hemisphere.

In taking issue with a recent assessment made by retired Gen. Paul Gorman in congressional testimony, Mr. Sanchez said the rebel forces were more than a cross-border raiding force.

He estimated that 10,000 anti-

Sandinista guerrillas are now operating inside Nicaragua in every part of the country except the populous west coast corridor that includes the capital and the major cities.

Another 10,000 fighters are expected to return in the next three or four months, he told The Times, and then the resistance can expect to draw more peasant recruits and deserters from the Sandinista army.

The struggle to convince Congress to keep funding the Contras, said Mr. Sanchez, is less difficult than maintaining unity within the Nicaraguan opposition. "Pulling themselves together is much more difficult than putting fighters into Nicaragua," he said. "That's being done."

U.S. officials lately have become increasingly pessimistic about the exiled leaders' ability to maintain unity and attract a following. The Contra leaders' mutual distrust and rivalries broke into the open last week when one leader, Arturo Cruz, indicated he would withdraw from the United Nicaraguan Opposition.

Despite such problems, Mr. Sanchez believes the Contras can win acceptance in Nicaragua and lead a popular insurrection similar to those in East Berlin in 1953 and Budapest in 1956.

"We cannot let it fail," said Mr. Sanchez, indicating U.S. military force should be used if needed.

In the past, other U.S. officials have hinted U.S. air and naval forces might be used to quarantine Nicaragua and prevent Cuba from rushing in reinforcements to prop up the Sandinista regime.